

1). Identify ways that corporations are a sustainability problem, referencing at least four examples from films you watched this semester.

As much as we want to believe that corporation is a person with legal and social responsibilities, it simply is not the case. According to *The Corporation*, a corporation is not more than a group of people legally bound together to achieve one goal—maximize profit for the shareholders. Under the concept of corporation personhood, a corporation differs from a person in that it has no social responsibility. These two facts combined are the paramount reason corporations are a sustainability problem.

There are two approaches to maximizing profit. Firstly, cutting costs by all means is legally justifiable, which leads to externalizing part of the real cost to produce certain products. *Triple Divide*, A documentary on the fracking industry, reveals the destruction on the surface of the earth necessary to release a reservoir of natural gas underground through high pressure injection of hydraulic fluids, not to mention the damage such an underground disruption does to the aquifers. Once the fracking company finishes disturbing nearby neighborhoods with a constant, burning flame and leaves, the local communities are left to deal with the unsanitary drinking water and natural habitat destruction. If the fracking industry has to compensate for the restoration of the drilling sites and surrounding areas, it would not be as prosperous and irresponsible as it is today.

Secondly, increasing revenue is another way to maximize profit. Thus, corporations will trick consumers into buying more by all means, regardless of whether consumers truly need the new products or the environmentally detrimental effects the new products have. Finding possible ways to generate more consumption has evidently become a profession, as shown in the film *The Merchants of Cool*. Once those teen culture specialists discovers a cool thing and the corresponding corporation makes a profit out of it, they will have to move on to find the next cool thing. In this way, there will be undisrupted demands from consumers, resulting in countless dollars flowing into the corporations. With consumerism and capitalism being the backbone of our economy, this profit maximization duty is inherently a sustainability problem.

Lastly, a few corporations are growing so colossal that people have no idea what corporations can do to affect their lives anymore. Aside from fabricating facts for their own interests (*Toxic Sludge Is Good For you*), corporations can also filter information via media. Monsanto's manipulation of FOX News in *The Corporation* proves just that. Without the news being the trusted source for accurate information, how can the people fight for greater sustainability?

3). Describe ways that mainstream media is a sustainability problem, referencing at least four examples from films you watched this semester.

Mainstream media is heavily integrated into our lives nowadays, in more more ways than we could ever imagined. Looking at the upside, we can conveniently stay current with matters happening and connected with people around the globe. When mainstream media is used properly, it has the power to reveal the ugly truth or organize protests and collective efforts to make a change, proven by 350.org (*Do the Math*).

However, the mainstream media sometimes falls into the control of corporations and there will be a malicious intention behind every message it puts out. *The Corporation* provides us with the example of FOX News being controlled by Monsanto. When FOX gets hold of a piece of news indicating the negative effects of Monsanto's growth hormone in cows has on the animals, environment, and human lives, Monsanto has just the money and influence to coerce FOX News to put away the news article and say something positive about Monsanto instead. In this case, mainstream media falsifies information due to its reliance on corporations to provide funding through advertisements and sponsorships. In other cases, mainstream media is directly owned by large corporations. *The Merchants of Cool* shows the audience how Viacom studies the teen demographic and then feeds them the "right" information for its own good. When the mainstream media becomes the puppet of corporations whose only goal is to maximize profit at all cost, how can we collectively put together an act for greater sustainability?

Once acquired control of mainstream media, the corporations use it for none but convincing the audience to buy more, bigger, better, and newer products. Consequently, the media landscape becomes cluttered with advertisements. In addition to explicit advertisements, product placements are also discretely weaved into the ad-free programs (*The Persuaders*). As a result, people think they are making a sustainable decision when they subconsciously already fell into consumerism's trap.

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4). Describe how the advertising industry a sustainability problem. Discuss the environmental implications of "communication for commerce," the effort to create emotional connections between consumers, commodities and companies, and the cultivation of "loyalty beyond reason" (*The Persuaders*). Also discuss whether sustainability advocates should borrow techniques from the adverting industry to advance *their* message.

The advertising industry by itself is not a sustainability problem at all. In fact, it only becomes problematic when corporations use it as a tool to fuel our consumerist society by limitlessly capitalizing natural resources. Also, most of the corporations that use advertising to their own advantages do no intend to make the world a better place. They only want to sell more products and make themselves wealthier than before. Therefore, their products are not built to be environmentally friendly. If a life cycle

assessment were to be performed, I bet there are environmentally harmful effects coming from almost every step of the way. When consumers, whether consciously or subconsciously, buy more things they may not need as told by the advertisements, they are seriously posing a threat to the health of the environment by taking parts in exploiting more natural resources, emitting more toxic substances to our precious environment, expanding the size of landfills, etc.

Regardless of how the advertising industry serves the society, it has been exceptionally successful, most likely due to the tremendous amount of investment from corporations. Ads can now fabricate an image, an emotional relationship, a lifestyle, and even an unnecessary community surrounding a product. When the advertising agency claims they are listening to the customers for their true needs, it is cleverly saying it needs a more direct way to discover and sell the next big thing. Once advertising drills the consumerist ideology into your head, you cannot distinguish your own want versus need anymore. Among other consumers, there is even peer pressure for not purchasing the newest version of a product.

Interestingly, advocates for sustainability has not been known to deploy these same strategies. I think it would be a fantastic idea to instill sustainability in people's heads. If these tactics can convince you to risk your future by hurting the environment, they can certainly turn people around. However, there should be a bottom line to this adaptation. Some of these strategies are deceptive or dishonest. While the malicious corporations are digging a bottomless hole for people to jump in, green advocates' holes should only be deep enough to wake people up.

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5). Discuss how Internet communication and other forms of new media are sustainability problems, as well as a means to sustainability solutions.

The advent of Internet and the technologies to access it have made the world much smaller, allowing people from opposite ends of the world to connect within split seconds. Fewer trees are needed to make paper for people to write letters, and messages no longer need to be sent via transportation modes with much larger carbon footprints. Accompanying the rise of the information age, news and other information, valuable or not, can effectively reach more people instantly. With regard to sustainability, there are major benefits of those new forms of media made possible with disruptive access to Internet. Firstly, new forms of Media like Facebook and Twitter are some of the most direct and efficient ways to reach the younger generation. If valuable information related to improving sustainability is packaged attractively to via these means of delivery, it would be easier than ever to educate and start a sustainability revolution with the Y generation. Secondly, everyone can spread information and knowledge across the Internet with putting sponsorships from corporations at stake. Therefore, corporations can no longer cover up the ugly truth by threatening or bribing the news on TV or radio.

Like every sword has two blades, there are also problems we ought to be mindful of with these new forms of media. As previously mentioned, the Internet is another mechanism for corporations to tell lies or convince you to buy more unsustainable products since everyone can share information. Plus, web browser cookies allow advertising to be much more personal. In order to distinguish true facts from clusters of lies, users of these new forms of media must advance their critical thinking skill. Unfortunately, that particular skill does not seem to be on the rise in this age of easy Internet access because people who retrieve their information from concise sources tend to skim quickly, skip the deep thinking and reflection process, and just take it as fact. On the plus side, at least people can compare multiple sources quickly, leading to greater chance of reading about the truth.

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6). Identify key characteristics of the best environmental media (recognizing that few films or other media are likely to have more than a few of these characteristics). Reference examples from films we've seen this semester.

First of all, a piece of good environmental media should shed light on a certain topic, and do so in a factual and comprehensive way. When informing audience a particular issue, it is important to present all sides to the story with as little bias as possible, providing the platform for the audience to form their own opinions. *The Corporation* and *Fresh* both did a rather decent job presenting multiple perspectives of issue at hand. Interviewees range from regulators of the industry to fishermen surviving on the fish population, from experts directly involved to experts of related industries, from proponents to opponents, and from victims to beneficiaries. Aside from interviews, the video footages, visual presentation of numerical data, etc. should all contribute to building a solid foundation of understanding. While the narrative can be reasonably biased according to the authors and creators, the audience should not be obstructed from making their own fair and accurate judgment.

Secondly, a piece of environmental media should explain why the audience ought to care about the issue at hand after raising it to their attention. It should enable the audience to relate to the problem on a personal level. Do not shy away from making the narrative personal and powerful. The audience needs to resonate with the story and feel as if they are actually suffering the negative effects of the environmental issue. While moderate use of emotional appeal is recommended, it should not be exaggerated or push any limits. *Bhopal*, a documentary on the Union Carbide incident in India, has some very visually persuasive images and footages, but some were at the point of cringe-inducing.

Finally, and most importantly, the message should inspire the audience to take action, in addition to being aware. To do so, offering suggestions on how individuals can contribute and sharing successful efforts are key to motivating the audience. A common and costly mistake to make would be emphasizing the severity of the situation too much without raising any hope, leading the audience to feel depressed and

deterred, which *Blind Spot* and *Triple Divide* certainly did. *Bhopal* arguably makes the audience a little bit more hopeless by showing the multiple failed attempt in court to request compensations for the damage.

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7). In a 2010 NY Magazine article, Jon Stewart describes his media team as "Soil enrichers. Maybe we can add a little fertilizer to the soil so that real people can come along and grow things." What does Stewart mean, and how persuaded are you by the metaphor? The NY Magazine article is "[America is a Joke](#)"

Imagine the news reporting landscape without comedy news or other news programs like Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*. It would be bland and boring. More importantly, it would be unhealthy! Everyday, news anchors would tell you what the corporations sponsoring the news programs want you to hear. Lies would have to be fabricated to conceal the ugly side of the industry. Corporations do so to ensure they would still make a profit off of whatever they do. Worse still, the serious and emotionless anchors would weave these lies into the facts and then convincingly deliver them so that audience takes the information as unbiased facts. Since the news is conceived as truthful and comprehensive, no one would be provoked to challenge its authority. Therefore, no noteworthy understanding would grow out of this lean and unhealthy soil.

Enters Jon Stewart, the soil enricher. He injects the much needed nutrition and vitality into the uniformly futile soil by adding new perspectives and previously missing informations to construct a more comprehensive understanding. Urging people to double take what they hear on traditional news broadcasts and providing the initial nutrition people need to grow interest in important news topics are the more valuable parts of his show. This type of "fertilizer" does not harm the soil either. His humorous way of delivering selected information blatantly shows his bias. Audience is not likely to mistake his show as authoritative news the traditional programs pretend to be. As fertilizer only cannot grow plants, Jon Stewart's show is only meant to compliment the traditional news.

I personally would not hesitate to agree with Jon Stewart's "soil enricher" metaphor for his media team. His show indeed instills doubt in people's minds and produce more thoughtful understanding of what is currently happening in the world, but I would add that he is slightly more than just fertilizer. His unconventional take on news delivery plants new seeds into the soil. Once the audience grows their own understanding, the garden has become more vibrant than before.

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9). Many Americans are skeptical about climate change, and climate science. What do you think explains the skepticism? What do you think scientists should do to further enroll the public in concern about climate change? The articles

listed below will provide material for your argument. Reference both articles in your answer.

***The Perception Factor: Climate Change Gets Personal. (Environmental Health Perspectives, 11/1/2010)**

<http://ehp03.niehs.nih.gov/article/fetchArticle.action?articleURI=info%3Adoi%2F10.1289%2Fehp.118-a484>

***Heroes wanted in climate science story (USA Today, 11/20/2010)**

http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/columnist/vergano/2010-11-05-climate-story_N.htm

There are many reasons for Americans to be skeptical about climate change. First of all, politicians are known to be very manipulative people, and they often lie to get what they want. Thus, many people might be dismissive when it comes to politics-related issues simply because of politics' undependable image in America, or just about anywhere in the world, which can explain why some people stop caring when politicians get involved. Similarly, Americans have grown to be selective with source of information since most forms of media are also intentionally manipulative. On a more personal level, some Americans naively think that climate change will never affect them or anyone they know, and some other Americans "perceive their burden to be disproportionate to that of others in the country".

Most importantly, both articles agree that communication has failed to bridge the gap between scientific facts and all the other non-scientific Americans. No proof is more revealing than the fact that with 97% of active climate researchers believing in climate change, only 52% of the public do the same. Given some Americans dispute climate change's existence due to a lack of comprehensive knowledge on the subject matter, this statistic clearly shows the disparity between how much the researchers know and how much of that is successfully translated to layman's science. Dan Vergano from USA Today stresses that the packaging of information is crucial to educating the public about climate change. He continues to point out that storytelling is fundamentally human. Even though scientists value facts over stories, this theory stands as one of the most indispensable advices to the climate scientists. More intriguing still is how much weight a likable hero in the story carries. Lastly, an interdisciplinary approach to information delivery can help with putting scientific facts in perspective for everyone, too.

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10). Explain, from your point of view, what the US government should do to advance environmental sustainability. What should the US government *not* do? Together, your lists should include at least six items. Include concrete examples to illustrate your points.

Far more important and influential to advancing environmental sustainability than anything else, US government should disconnect itself from corporations. Big corporations absolutely has the power to corrupt the government through massive

fundings to put the right party in office. In the end, they just need the government by their sides so that they can continue to make profits irresponsibly. The government needs to return to its root and becomes the servant of the people once again. Why is it so important for one party to win over the other? When the environment can no longer sustain our activities, that will put an end to both parties, simultaneously. The government must wake up now and realize there are many more urgent matters to take care of, rather than winning the next campaign.

Secondly, the government should take initiative in steering our economy away from a growth-based model because every resource we know of is finite. One day, there will no longer be any substitutional resource to sustain capitalism and consumerism. Plus, we are already putting too much burden on the environment by producing, consuming, and wasting too much to live the lifestyle we are told by the corporations.

Next, American needs to stop intruding other countries and “defending world peace” when in fact it is attempting to secure cheap energy for the future. Going to war or maintain such a enormous military is both financially and environmentally costly to America. The US government should understand that acquiring more fossil fuel to burn is an unsustainable dead end. Innovation is the way back to an untouchable leadership position.

Once the military’s budget is cut and the government has some money to spend, investing in an education system reform will pay back substantially. In many aspects, the US system has fallen behind many other countries. While at it, sustainability should become the core of the new education system. Starting over with the younger generations can significantly advance sustainability.

With the rest of the money, the US government should use it to incentivize sustainable businesses or industries. For instance, the electric car industry and private, small-scale farmers really deserve some monetary support from the government, for the sake of greater sustainability. At the same time, the government should cut back fundings for unsustainable practices.

Lastly, environmental regulations of many polluting industries should turn up a few notches. Monitoring and regulation should be implemented throughout the life cycle of any product. Corporations should never be able to run away with irresponsibly disposing toxic into surrounding ponds and etceteras without having to pay for wide-reaching, perpetual destruction of the environment.

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12). Identify ten developments (in education, law, media, etc) that you think would help mobilize greater public awareness of and commitment to environmental sustainability.

Mobilizing greater public awareness of and commitment to environmental sustainability can be tackled with an omnidirectional approach. The following developments can collectively contribute to the effort.

First of all, it is paramount to start sustainability education at an early age, before consumerism is deeply rooted in the next generation's mindset. Thus, sustainability should be at the core of child education. For a widespread effect, public school system would obviously be the first place to implement this change.

Secondly, lowering the cost of college education has proven to significantly increase the chance of graduates volunteering in non-profit organizations. Conversely, most American college graduates choose to serve the wealthy, unsustainable industries under the pressure of college debts.

Thirdly, a new industry must rise to specialize in properly translating scientific facts for educating the public. In addition, this profession should fully leverage the independent, social media landscape to delivery the unbiased facts to the public.

Fourthly, more scientific research should be funded by the government, instead of corporations who tend to draw favorably biased conclusions. By doing so, the credence of scientific studies would dramatically increase and become more easily accepted by the public.

Fifthly, environmental regulations on the polluting industries must tighten up by a lot. Corporations have to pay the true cost of their actions, rather than leaving the public to suffer the environmental damage caused by their economic activities.

Sixthly, greater transparency of the industries must be required. The government and public should be able to easily monitor corporations' activity. Available information throughout the life cycle of a product, such as suppliers of raw material and management of toxic waste, keeps the corporation in check.

Seventhly, incentives for independent, non-profit organizations like 350.org will encourage the growth of such organizations. As a result, the people will gain access to more vital sustainability information and their effort will become more organized.

Eighthly, startup companies offering a sustainable product or service should be subsidized so that their product or service can become more affordable than the conventional, unsuitable alternatives.

Ninthly, more farmer's markets can greatly increase the awareness of environmental sustainability because independent farmers naturally oppose their competing agricultural titans. Therefore, the farmers' wholehearted efforts to sell their products and educate their customers as to why they should support small-scale farming are inherently genuine.

Lastly, there should be a legalized, consistent labeling system for customers to easily identify the sustainable products amid the lesser ones.

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18). What attitudes and cultural constructs in the United States will environmental educators need to work against? Reference at least two films. Briefly describe at least one activity for k-12 students that would work against these attitudes and cultural constructs.

Countless attitudes and cultural constructs in the United States hinder educators in planting a sustainability seed in students. For examples, devoted Christians genuinely think that as long as they keep praying, God will resolve every problem on earth because he really created the entire planet single-handedly; many Americans are very arrogant and closed-minded because they still think the United States is absolutely the best country in the world and there is nothing to be learned from other countries; Hollywood celebrities effortlessly promote an excessive lifestyle that many people blindly chase after. Following are two more detailed examples of why these attitudes and cultural constructs are seriously a sustainability problem.

As seen in *The Corporation*, *The Persuaders*, *The Merchants of Cool*, as well as *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You*, corporations and media try exceptionally hard to understand the consumers, not for satisfying their needs but for generating more wants. Ubiquitous advertisements deeply imprint the image of cool in students' minds and show them the ways to stay cool by buying the newest stuff before schools even get the chance to educate the negative effects of consumerism. Students' natural tendency to imitate is not to be blamed, but it becomes incredibly hard to break the loop when media like MTV starts to mirror the teenagers.

The concept of unconditional convenience is another huge obstruction in sustainability education. *Fresh* showcases people's demand for convenient access to a wide variety of foods even when they are not in season. The huge amount of energy and environmental damage required to achieve such convenience are rather obvious. Cameron Tonkinwise also points out that the level of expected convenience can only go higher, during his "How Can Sustainable Practices Overcome the Gravitational Pull of Convenience" lecture. Once people grow accustomed to the ease of instant communication over the Internet, it is impossible for them to revert to telegraphs and such.

In order to counter the belief that some items need to be frequently updated to stay cool, I have a competition in mind that might teach younger students the unique storytelling aspect of long-lasting products. The competition would start by asking students to choose an item out of their possession, and then they will share as many interesting stories revolving that item as they can. A poll will decide which student's item aged better by garnering marks, stories, and characters.

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